DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 399 886 HE 029 522

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TITLE Research Agenda Development by New Faculty: A Case Study.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Rank (Professional); *Administrator Role; Beginning Teachers; Career Ladders; College Faculty; Communication (Thought Transfer); Faculty Promotion; Higher Education; Interviews; Mentors; *Nontenured Faculty; *Peer Relationship; *Professional Development; Publish or Perish Issue; *Research Universities

ABSTRACT

This report, based on a series of interviews and document analyses, presents a case study of one new college faculty member showing the relationships between a department chair, program head, and the new faculty member concerning research expectations and development. The report argues that to be successful in the contemporary research university, a new faculty member must be equipped and able to assume directed lines of inquiry. It maintains that, considering issues of tenure, promotion, and career satisfaction, this research agenda is heightened in importance and becomes an issue for the employing department as well as the faculty member. Analysis suggests that the department chair can aid a new faculty member in establishing a research agenda by providing mentoring opportunities, allowing for open communication, providing peer support, and allowing for concentration on content knowledge. (Contains 13 references.) (Author/CK)

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ED 399 886

Research Agenda Development by New Faculty:

A Case Study

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Running Head: Research Agenda Development

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HE 029 522

Abstract

To be successful in the contemporary research university, a new faculty member must be equipped and able to assume directed lines of inquiry, often resulting in either a formal or informal research agenda. Considering issues of tenure, promotion, and career satisfaction, this research agenda is heightened in importance, and becomes an issue for the employing department as well as the faculty member. The current study, based on a series of interviews and document analysis, provided the case of the relationships between a department chair, program head, and new faculty member concerning research expectations and development. The studied revealed that the department chair can aid a new faculty member in establishing a research agenda by, to varying extents based individual situations, providing mentoring opportunities, allowing for open communications, providing peer support, and allowing for concentration on content knowledge.

In 1986, a faculty member at a comprehensive university in the Southeast sued the institution when the faculty voted against him for tenure. His accusations, which included the negligence of the department chair to fully explain expected duties, were for the most part ignored until he won the law suit. Today, the institution, like many other higher education institutions, provide faculty with some sort of job description, usually no more than a letter of appointment which describes expected job responsibilities as being a teacher, conducting original scholarly research, and participating in college and community service.

As these commonly accepted duties for faculty range in expectations from institution to institution, there is little doubt in academe that the focus of the contemporary college teacher is either research or teaching. For Carnegie Classification Research institutions, which represent the largest and most prestigious universities, the production of scholarly research is paramount to faculty roles.

The impact of a research focused institution on a faculty member's career is unclear, but the perceived stress of being forced to publish has led to the to the development of faculty counseling clinics at some institutions and comprehensive faculty mentoring at others (Ross, 1987). With projected declines in available, qualified faculty, the need to retain existing faculty and refine their capabilities to earn tenure has become a major concern for academic administrators (Bowen & Schuster, 1986).

In many situations, the academic department chair has been identified as the individual with the most power, influence, and ability to aid junior faculty in their transition to become productive, departmental assets. Department chairs can do more than simply acculturate new faculty members, and can play a major role in developing professional success.

There are also a number of strategies available for new faculty members to take advantage of to help assure their own success. Among the most prominent is the organization of selected research interests and activities into a formal timeline and program of work on an annual basis. Often termed 'research agenda,' this type of interest focusing can help new faculty members channel energies into a productive, timely effort which will aid in the earning of tenure and career satisfaction.

The purpose for conducting this study was to reveal how departmental chairperson and program head assisted a new faculty member in developing a research agenda. The department involved in the study offered both graduate and undergraduate courses, and was one of four departments within a comprehensive school of education at a research-oriented university. The department chair was interviewed to provide the primary source of data. A program head was then interviewed, and subsequently, a new faculty member from the same program was interviewed. Faculty meeting minutes and supporting materials from the new faculty member's initial academic semester were studied for additional validation of study findings.

Background of the Study

There have been a number of authors and researchers who have argued that the relationship between the department chair and the faculty member is a delicate balance, restricted by professional and academic freedom, individual personalities, and competing interests (Kimball, 1979). Despite this, Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, and Beyer (1990) contended that the department chair must be aggressive in "reaching out" to faculty. This reaching out must include, they held, constant evaluation of efforts, developing consensus within the department, and even monitoring progress on courses and research.

Cross (1991), however, warned academic administrators, such as department chairs, of over-stepping their boundaries. She claimed that adults behave differently than any other group of learners, and they need to be treated with additional respect and should be included in decision-making and objective development. She directly discouraged constant evaluation claiming that this can serve to discourage faculty and learners from taking risks, exploring new areas, and developing their own personal styles and interests.

Shandley (1989) felt that faculty members, much like students, needed to be encouraged to take risks and develop their own professional personality. The best way to do this, he claimed, was through the use of mentoring. By allowing a faculty member or student to work with a colleague to answer questions, refine research strategies, or manage a personal life, the

perspective of an equal may well be the most helpful. A colleague who has been in the same situation, may at least appear to be more valuable than that of someone desiring specific outputs (e.g., the department chair).

The concept of mentoring had been addressed several years earlier in a review of literature on faculty productivity (Creswell, 1985). Dealing with sociology and "social-psychology," Creswell described faculty who were most productive in scholarly publications. These faculty reported having frequent networking opportunities, a positive relationship with the department chair and dean, and in some instances, positive environmental factors such as research support money.

The concept of environmental factors playing a major role in faculty productivity and determining research focus has been an issue of growing concern as Americans reduce the amount of free time they spend on "free-time" (Boice, 1982). What techniques a department chair chooses to employ needs to be flexible enough to accommodate a new faculty member's typically busy schedule. These techniques should also be capable of channeling faculty doubts, questions, and concerns away from the individual, and help the new member recognize external factors which are uncontrollable.

Boice also argued that the only way to appreciate the tenure process is through first-hand experience, and as such, felt that peer counseling may be the best "technique" available for

academic departments in coaching faculty through the tenure process.

There have been a variety of other strategies that department chairs have implemented to help new faculty develop the needed skills and credentials to earn tenure. Some chairs have found that the doctoral degree alone is enough direction for faculty (Laabs, 1987), while others have felt that human resource management techniques such as consensus building and empowerment are the keys to faculty productivity (Chenault & Burnford, 1978; Stern, 1988).

Kolstoe (1974) described this entire process as being unique at virtually every institution, and despite efforts to formalize the department chair's role, different activities will be effective at different institutions. Even though this description of situational publish or perish was written over twenty years ago, it remains an accurate reflection of the American professorate in the 1990's.

Methods

Two common forms of qualitative research were used in the completion of this study: interviews and document analysis. The department chair was first interviewed, followed by a program head, and a new faculty member. The interviews with the department chair and program head were held in their respective offices, and tapes of the interviews were transcribed for analysis. The interview with the new faculty member was

completed outside of the departmental office, and comprehensive notes were taken of the faculty member's responses to question stems.

Upon the completion of the interviews, department faculty meeting minutes from the faculty member's first semester were studied. While support for specific themes were sought, additional concepts which related to the new faculty member's research agenda were studied.

After all sources of data were reviewed, specific categories were identified in each interview and supported to some extent by findings from faculty meeting minutes. At least two additional categories were found to have an impact on the new faculty member that had not surfaced during the interviews.

The analysis, which was reflective of a constant comparison technique, involved the searching out of key words and phrases representative of themes or concepts. These key words and phrases were combined into larger categories to finally arrive at four main themes in faculty research agenda development.

Analysis of Data

Profile of Participants

Department Chair: The department chair involved in the study had been on the institution's faculty since 1974, first as an instructor, then an instructor and part-time doctoral student, and finally an assistant professor in a tenure track position. She earned tenure while in her 30's, and assumed the department

chair position July 1, 1989. Prior to working at the university she had taught high school. In all of her positions, she worked in business education and had focused her research efforts and teaching on practical, applied subjects.

She originally had no intention of working in higher education, but family circumstances allowed her the opportunity to work in an area outside of the high school.

> ...I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I really didn't decide to teach in higher education until my husband got his doctorate and the job at Wesleyan...the only job available to me was here at the University and I didn't see that much difference between teaching at the college level and the teaching at the senior level in high school...it just kind of evolved.

After 17 years at the same university, she was promoted to full professor, and has produced the majority of her research money and publications in the last six years. A good deal of this research has been through joint projects with other faculty and graduate students, and her self-reported ability to openly and effectively communicate has enabled her to initiate many of these projects.

Claiming to have an 'open-door' policy, she expected faculty and students to "stick their heads in and tell me what's on their minds." While she claimed not to be an expert on each area in the department, which included vocational and adult education programs, she felt that the institution's resources, such as a statistics lab and teaching center, needed to be taken advantage of, and sometimes the best she could do was to refer faculty to these resources.

With these resources available, she perceived the primary role of the department to be teaching. "Our mission, one of our primary goals is to provide the best education available to students in this area." While she admitted that the creation of new ideas and knowledge was important, especially at this land grant institution, she firmly believed that the department existed to provide education for students.

Personally, the department chair was married and had two adult children. She followed a department chair who had a "dominating" personality and a 20-year career at the institution. She had also been placed in an awkward position due to her husband's failing health, which proved to be both time consuming and emotionally draining during the past year.

Program Head: The program head involved in this study was in his fourth year, and was reportedly feeling pressure about working for tenure.

In his mid-30's, the program head was hired in 1987 as an assistant professor and was named program head in mid-1988 when the other two members of the program left the institution. Unlike the department chair, he had every intention of working in higher education. Serving as a research assistant as an undergraduate and graduate student, he had some teaching experience through workshops dealing with medical training. Following the completion of his doctorate in 1985, he spent a year away from higher education working in several different areas, including a private research firm.

With this background, he felt that his primary concern must be research, especially for a theoretical field such as adult education. "Adult education has some very practical components to it, but past and recent trends have been to better understand this field and its dynamics before research is applied."

The program head had made numerous presentations and achieved very strong student evaluations, but had few publications. He had, however, returned to doing the kinds of research for publication he did as a graduate student and researcher, and with the transition of junior faculty to lead faculty member, he believed that he had to make sacrifices.

He perceived his role as program head to be one of student recruitment and advisement, and when necessary, as a colleague and mentor to fellow faculty. "I can't be much of a mentor, though," he commented during the interview. "I only have three real years in being a faculty member, and at times I really question how much I can offer a colleague."

Personally, he was married and had two children. He was an avid runner, did not like the politics of the university, yet felt that the campus environment was what kept him there. He attributed his desire to stay at his current institution to the "intellectual ambiance" of the college, but would consider leaving the institution after he "gets" tenure. He very much attempted to keep his personal life out of the office.

New Faculty Member: The new faculty member, a male in his late-30's, came to the institution in the fall of 1989 from a private, practitioner institution in the Chicago area. Despite his open objection and distaste for the location of the institution, he felt that the location was a pleasant change, for a time away from the "big city." Being a native of a European country, he earned his doctorate in 1981 from an American institution near Chicago.

He was the first person in his family to attend college, and had started his doctorate in Great Britain until family pressure discouraged him to the extent that he left graduate school with only his dissertation to write. Taking a research position working with economic trade, he met several faculty members from the United States and came to American specifically to earn his doctoral degree. He worked two jobs for "a time" in the Chicago area after earning his doctorate, and eventually took a job with a private, practitioner school in Chicago. After being married, he moved to St. Louis for two years to work at one of the school's branch campuses, and then transferred back to the Chicago area.

> I don't know if location is all that important, but remember, I grew up in rural Ireland on a farm. The city has certainly been very good to me...I got my first job in the States, I met my wife, I had my first child. Also, I think time away from work is very important to me...I'll never become a work-a-holic. Life is too precious for that kind of lifestyle.

Both of this faculty member's parents were killed in a car accident shortly after his arrival in the United States.

He perceived his role in the department to be one of research first and teaching second. The idea of service, he contended, was a derivative of solid research. "You need to be able to build those service activities like conferences and workshops into your research...it's all a matter of getting two-for-one deals...you get credit for research and the service."

During his first year at this institution, he developed a semi-formal research agenda, and was one of the most productive faculty members in the department. He made two presentations at professional conferences, completed a book he had been working on, and had an article published. How, he was asked, was all of this accomplished, "...it really comes down to guarding your time and saying 'no' to a lot of things."

He also expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with the department and the way it was run. He described his feelings as being "alone" and non-supported as a new faculty member in adult education. The other adult education faculty member who was hired at the same time resigned to pursue other interests. This faculty member alluded that it may very well have been the department's environment.

Personally, he was married and recently had his second child. He preferred to work during the days and had many hobbies and reported enjoying time with his wife. One of the hobbies he noted was poetry writing. He and his wife recently purchased a house, and he spent a good deal of time with his family. He commented that he intended to spend no more than five years at

this institution, and was already planning to up for tenure early.

Strategies for Research Agenda Development

Throughout the interviews and study of the departmental meeting minutes, four strategies were identified that related to the development of the new faculty member's research agenda. The first two of these were prescribed by the department chair, while the second two were not formal attempts to develop a research agenda but seemed to arise from the data collected as methods for enhancing research.

1. **Faculty Mentoring**

The department chair described this as being one of the most effective techniques the department could possibly utilize. Entailing the assignment of a faculty mentor from another department in the college of education to help the new faculty member better understand his role in a department and provide an opportunity to meet people in the college. The department chair commented "the teacher's college is so segmented in terms of space, if you don't get the young faculty involved with the other department's, they never really get a sense of who else is in the college..."

Consistent with the techniques prescribed in the literature, the program head recognized the apparent value of the mentoring program:

> On paper, you know, something like this looks great, it provides opportunities for interaction, it allows an exploration of the college, but in reality, it is not always executed that well. Now granted, I didn't go through any mentoring, but from what I've seen, I think the validity of it is questionable.

The new faculty member was not as kind as the program head. In almost a bitter fashion, he condemned the entire thought of having a mentor from physical education when he claimed to deal with the theoretical value of educational philosophy.

> What really gets me is that here someone who hardly knows me and my interests assigns me to someone else in the college. I met with my mentor once, for coffee, and he babbled about football and life in this wonderful town. I never heard from him again.

The department chair apparently had intended a valuable long-term relations, but the concept apparently failed in implementation. In the case of the department, from the tone of the program head and the new faculty member, the department chair needed to monitor the program more closely. The new faculty member perceived the monitoring assignment as an indication of little faith in the talents and skills of the new faculty member, and resulted in the deterrence of the faculty member from seeking advice and input from the chair. This was reinforced by the new faculty member's satirical use of the term "mentor" in describing various situations.

2. Open Door Policy

The department chair in this setting emphasized the use of open communication between herself and her faculty. This "open communication," however, was entirely voluntary and often

dependent upon the mood of faculty members. She recognized this and commented:

> My door is always open, and if they have a problem they come in and talk to me, I hope. They always come in and share the good things, but I hope that they will come in and share their problems with me also. Some people like to solve their own problems, and tell me what happened afterward...I think it takes them a while before they do that, so I often have to go to them and say how are things going...some people don't like you to be looking over their shoulder because they think you are being nosey...I just like to know what's going on all the time.

The program head enjoyed this type of monitoring, noting that he often got so wrapped up in his own world that it was nice to know that he was still part of the department and that others were concerned. While this type of evaluation has not been particularly helpful in terms of research, it has been very beneficial to him personally. "It's been great for my psyche, but not for publications" he noted.

The new faculty member had been resistant to this type of evaluation or monitoring, terming it "mothering." He felt that he was a professional and did not need to be 'bed-checked' once a week to see if he was writing and if classes were going well. This resentment led to some personality conflicts between the chair and the faculty member.

One particular example that both the chair and faculty member discussed was the issue of the faculty member's book. He felt comfortable working on it in addition to his other assignments, and claimed that "such an incredible gap" in the area of training and development within adult education existed,

that a book of this type was a "necessity." The chair, on the other hand, felt that writing a book "eats up too much of your time, and it only counts as one more publication...my advice to them (non-tenured faculty), whether or not they take it, is to get tenure then write your book." The new faculty member claimed this was a source of tension for the first semester he was on staff, then the chair simply mentioned that she was happy the book writing went well for him.

3. Peer Support

One of the areas that received little to no attention during the interviews but arose as a major theme in the faculty meeting minutes was the idea of peer support. The program head did mention briefly that his success in developing an agenda of presentations to make and research to accomplish came from his peers while working on his doctorate. "There was a group of us who were going to change the world of adult education, and we divided an area for each of us to take."

The faculty meeting structures were fairly loose in organization, yet in seven of the nine meetings was at least some dialogue was reported between faculty members, including the new faculty member involved in the study, about "focusing research." In one meeting in November, the minutes reported that a faculty member who had been at the institution for three years was re-submitting a grant to a banker's association. The new faculty member indicated an interest in reading the project and assisting if needed. At the following meeting in December, the new faculty

member indicated he was going to write two variations of the grant on different scales for funding.

In an earlier faculty meeting, the new faculty member asked everyone in attendance for assistance in a section of a course. Two different faculty members arranged a meeting to help him.

In a third situation, the department chair had asked for two volunteers to serve on a college-wide committee, and no one responded. At a subsequent meeting, a faculty member asked for volunteers to serve on the same committee previously mentioned, and the new faculty member volunteered.

These situations seemed to indicate that the new faculty member was more responsive to other faculty members rather than the department chair.

4. Content Knowledge

Throughout each interview and meeting minutes, the chair readily admitted that she was not an expert on adult education; her background was business education. On several occasions in faculty meetings, for example, she offered to help with adult education proposal budgets and formats, but not the content. The program head also went out of his way to note that the best she could do was help him personally, and to a very limited extent, professionally.

The new faculty member went a step further and indicated a resentment toward her for being chair of the department and not an expert in adult education. Using the phrases such as "she is too narrowly focused" and "she will pigeon-hole the department,"

he felt that the department chair should have a background in all areas that the department offers programs, especially at the graduate level.

The new faculty member expanded on this lack of content knowledge by the department chair to claim that the majority of his inspiration and research interests were developed by faculty at other institutions, his students, and even other faculty who were "qualified" to discuss his ideas with him.

The department chair, after admitting her shortcomings in the field, felt that she could be of the most use to faculty in helping to develop annual goals and objectives.

> While they sometimes need more than numbers of articles to publish, I really think it is helpful to them and me to sit down and talk about what activities they are planning on undertaking during the year...I try to help them organize and priorities their activities.

She also felt that by openly communicating about grant proposals and classes, she would continually develop a background in adult education, and would in time, be able to write and research in that area. For the time being, she was content to individually develop her background in the area, and felt that part of the responsibility for activities involving specific content-questions belonged to the program head.

Discussion

The development of new faculty members by a department chair can be challenging. In this situation, not only was the faculty member new, but compounding office tensions, the program under

study had a high turnover rate of faculty since the early-1980's, and the program head admittedly had little experience. Although the new faculty member was able to develop a multi-year research agenda, focusing on themes rather than specific projects, it was necessary to question if a problem did exist in the department's structure or communication mechanisms. The attitudes of both faculty members and the chair provided a foundation for potential difficulties related to supervisory responsibilities and faculty morale. In this particular situation, all three members of the study may be partially responsible for possible future departmental breakdowns.

The department chair was handling the situation with the new faculty member consistent with much of the literature on managing an academic department, but it did not appear to be entirely effective. Consistent with the literature, it would appear that she needed to take a more active role in monitoring the effectiveness of the mentoring program, for example. Eventually she may very well find other more efficient means of aiding new faculty members. As Professor X (1973) noted, an individual academic manager's style and success comes not with a position, but with time in a position.

The same may be true for the program head. While he maintained a fairly neutral stance in moderating the relationship between the chair and the new faculty member, he may want to take a more active role in developing a program-wide research focus. His duty, he noted, called for him to help make the program as

successful as possible through whatever means he could draw upon. This may include being more open with faculty members and the department chair, especially to help defuse potentially negative confrontations.

Apparently, much of the hostility in the situation arose from the new faculty member. He was hired by one department chair and reported to another, and additionally, collective bargaining was in use at the new faculty member's alma mater. Part of the difficulty may be rooted in his doctoral training, where collective bargaining arrangements forbid department chairs from teaching as they were defined as "management." Additionally, the new faculty member resisted attempts at communication which may be the result of his dissatisfaction with being away from the Chicago area. His comment "I really doubt I'll be here for more than five years" indicated that he may not be completely satisfied with his decision to leave an urban setting.

There were at least two additional trends in the interviews and minutes which related to faculty success. The first of these dealt with the family. Family considerations helped the department chair to earn a doctoral degree and teach at the university level, and similar family considerations nearly prevented the new faculty member from completing a doctorate. The amount of time that each respondent devoted to the family in the interviews seemed to indicate that there needed to be some

personal as well as professional development activities offered to the new faculty member.

The other theme in the collected data was the approach each person took to arrive at their current position. The program head and new faculty member both went from researchers to teachers, while the department chair went from teacher to researcher. This may at least be part of the reason that the faculty members wanted more direction in research, but the chair was hesitant to make that kind of offer.

In terms of research agenda development, many components of the data reflected that an agenda, per se, was essentially part of the overall faculty development process. There was no encouragement to apply for certain grants or to write for certain journals. Instead, the product rather than the content of the research was provided consistently with attention. Further, a formal research agenda, as referred to by the participants in the study, was a collection of fairly specific themes and categories rather than a group of projects to be undertaken. Thus, to develop a research agenda was to ask a scholar to focus research into one, two, or three areas and concentrate both teaching and research exercises into those areas.

This department chair and new faculty member relationship was believed to be fairly unique in the college, yet further inquiry into the dynamics of department chairs and new faculty members should be undertaken. Themes which began to appear, but were inconsistent, included gender, regular office hours,

emphasis on teaching, and even use of free time. All of these could be explored and found to impact he current understanding of the chair-faculty relationship.

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